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The movement for a purse was dropped—happily, says the noble reformer; but his kind friend voted him an address of welcome and congratulations. He drew it up himself, with the help of an ex-viceroy and two ex-governors, and had it signed by many of the notable leaders of society. The address was sent to Mr. Malabari when he was on the continent. It is treasured among the most precious possessions of the reformer, “not so much for its intrinsic value—though it is very high—but as the gift of a loyal and loving friend, a wise and faithful guide, and a valiant supporter.”²⁵

From the high religious synthesis of the *Hibbert Lectures* we have come to the particulars of the intercourse of two men who, it seems, have realized that fusion between the East and the West for which some among the higher classes are fervently longing. In like manner Max Müller’s influence has asserted itself in India by infusing a new life into Hindu society and religion, and captivating the friendship and admiration of the best minds of the country.

Mr. Malabari was thus a faithful interpreter of the general feeling when, on Max Müller’s demise (the writer was then his guest at Mahabaleshwar in the Ghâts), he sent a wire to Mrs. Max Müller telling her that “all India mourned with her!”²⁶

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MARTIN LUTHER’S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PRINCIPLE OF LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

The principle of liberty of conscience was given the foremost place in Luther’s programme of reforms after the Leipzig Disputation (July, 1519). But when a few years later the reformer decided that the new church should be united with the state, he did not hesitate to call upon the secular arm to come to the aid of the church in the attempt to suppress heresy. In later years he reacquired the view which he had held before he assumed the rôle of a reformer—that capital punishment is to be inflicted on heretics.¹

If the testimony of Leo X, as stated in the bull *Exsurge Domine* (June 15, 1520), may be relied upon, Luther held at that time the damnable heresy that “to burn heretics is against the will of the Spirit.” The famous book, *To the Christian Nobles*, which he wrote in June, 1520, is an eloquent

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

²⁶ *Life and Letters*, Vol. II, p. 421.

¹ Cf. *Theologischer Jahresbericht*, Vol. XXIII, p. 515.

plea for religious liberty. The reformer shows that every Christian is a member of a spiritual priesthood, and that there can be no earthly authority, either ecclesiastical or secular, to rule over the Christian conscience. In the book *Of the New Bull and Falsehood of Eck* Luther refutes the insinuation of his opponent that his disapproval of the burning of heretics was due to his own love of life, since he realized his tenets to be heretical. "The Papists in Rome," he observes, "when they find themselves unable to resist the truth, slaughter the people and by killing solve all arguments."²

It was after the Diet of Worms, during Luther's sojourn at the Wartburg (April, 1521-March, 1522), that he decided on a union of the new church with the state. At that time Andrew Carlstadt, his colleague, introduced the first actual reforms in Wittenberg, abolishing mass and administering the Lord's Supper in both kinds to the congregation. Luther realized that Carlstadt's course was sure to lead to divisions within the Saxon church. After some hesitation he resolved that a new church should be organized only when the civil government was ready to make the acceptance of the new creed compulsory for the whole land. In other words, to maintain the (nominal) unity of the church, the task of ecclesiastical reformation was to be taken out of the people's hands and turned over to the princes and secular rulers, to whom, it must be said, the acceptance of the Reformation brought great material advantages.

Luther's deviation from the principle of liberty of conscience is distinctly traceable. In January, 1522, he wrote a book on the relation of the state to the Christian church, and chose for it the title, *A True Admonition to All Christians to Abstain from Uproar and Sedition*. There is indication, he says, in the introduction, that there are those who would slay or drive away the priests, "unless they promise thorough reformation." But presently he corrects himself, admitting that he knows there is no danger of such an outbreak. He then proceeds to show that a reformation of the church should take place only with the sanction of the civil rulers. The secular authorities, he says, should take this matter into their hands, "every prince in his own land." "But," he complains, "they fail to do anything." Yet he urges that the people "shall without the command of the government or the initiative of the authorities do nothing in regard to this matter." He further says:

Therefore, look upon the government. As long as they do not undertake anything and do not give a command, you should keep quiet with hand, mouth and heart, and should be unconcerned about it. If you can persuade the government to proceed and give a command, you may do so. If the government be

² Erlangen edition of Luther's works (German), Vol. XXIV, p. 19.

not willing, neither should you be. But if you proceed, you are in the wrong and are far worse than the other party [the Romanists].³

This book, it is worthy of notice, Luther addressed to his followers in the states where the cause was expected ultimately to triumph, although a new church had not yet been organized. He did by no means propose that the subjects of a Roman Catholic ruler should forever abide within the fold of that church. For Lutherans in Roman Catholic states he demanded toleration. One year after the publication of the *True Admonition*, when his translation of the New Testament was put under the ban in several states and the people were ordered to deliver the book to the authorities, he wrote a tract on *How Far Is a Christian under Obligation to Obey the Magistrates?* He warns his friends against surrendering the book. Conscience should be free, he contends, and "no one may have authority over the soul but God."⁴ In the same year (1523) he wrote a tract, *That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Authority to Decide in All Questions of Doctrine and to Call and Depose Ministers*. From these books it is obvious that the reformer found it difficult to discard the great principle of liberty of conscience. He attempted to maintain it in theory at a time when with his approval heretics were persecuted in Saxony.

After he had decided that Lutheranism was to be introduced by the Saxon government, and the organization of the proposed new church should consequently be deferred, Luther returned from the Wartburg to Wittenberg and discarded the reforms which had been introduced by Carlstadt. Mass in the Latin language was restored, and the communion *sub utraque* was abolished at the public altar. The weak, it was urged, had been offended by Carlstadt's reforms. The fact, on the other hand, that the restoration of Romanism caused great offense was ignored. When Frederick the Wise died, in May, 1525, and his brother John, a staunch Lutheran, succeeded him, the new church was organized and the Lutheran creed made compulsory for the whole land, the protests of the weak being considered out of place at this time.

Dr. Carlstadt, the former dean of Wittenberg University, was banished from Saxony, September 16, 1524, by Duke (afterward Elector) John. This severe measure has sometimes been justified on the supposition that the persecuted reformer was a revolutionary disturber of the peace. His crime, however, consisted in this, that (at Orlamünde) he proceeded with the introduction of reforms independently of Martin Luther. His recent

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXII, p. 49.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

biographer, Dr. Hermann Barge, in a standard work which is indispensable for the study of the beginnings of the Reformation,⁵ portrays him as the first representative of evangelical Puritanism, and shows that he has been persistently misrepresented by the historians of the established church. Two other ministers, Dr. Gerhard Westerburg and Martin Reinhard, of Jena, both friends of Carlstadt, were banished with him. In his book, *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, Luther informs us that Carlstadt's banishment had his full approval. "Now tell me, my pious reader," he says further, "have the princes of Saxony not had enough patience with the mad spirit? Yes, alas, too much."⁶ Later he advised the elector that in his opinion the proper penalty to be inflicted on Carlstadt was imprisonment.

The first instance, however, of Luther's invoking the aid of the magistracy in the interest of "pure doctrine" seems to be that of the minister of Oelsnitz (his name is unknown). This brave man, in all probability a friend of Carlstadt, rejected mass at a time when Luther had restored it in Wittenberg. About one year before Carlstadt's banishment the Wittenberg reformer wrote to Michael von der Strassen, *Geleitsmann* at Borna: "My petition therefore is that you advise the Schösser of Oelsnitz that he should command the preacher to go slowly and first of all preach Christ properly, putting off his fanaticism, or leave the place."⁷ Again, on December 5, 1523, he wrote to the same officer, admonishing him earnestly "to use force and either drive the preacher of Oelsnitz away or compel him to talk this awkward notion out of the people and to recant." He advises the authorities to "take one or six by the neck and cast them into prison."⁸ A few weeks later the pastorate of Oelsnitz was vacant.⁹ Whether the minister had fled or been removed by force is uncertain.

In a tract which Luther wrote in 1528 on the Anabaptists and their principles, and in which he speaks of them as "the devil's sure messengers," he disapproves of capital punishment for those who may err in doctrine alone, but is of the opinion that they are not to be tolerated in the land. A few years later, in 1532, he wrote another little book against the dissenters, giving it the title, *Concerning the Sneaks and Hedge-Preachers*. He urges the magistrates to make it everybody's duty, by severe penalties, to report promptly concerning the wandering preachers who are not of the established church. The civil authorities, he says, should permit strangers to preach only after the state church pastor of the parish has examined them

⁵ Barge, *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1905).

⁶ Erlangen, Vol. XXIX, p. 174.

⁷ DeWette, *Luthers Briefe*, Vol. II, p. 423.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 458, 460.

and pronounced them orthodox. These preachers ought to labor in public announcing their appointments beforehand. If they will not do this, they are surely the devil's messengers. "Whoever tolerates and hears them should know that he hears the devil himself, as he is speaking out of a possessed person."¹⁰ It is worthy of notice that the time when the Lutheran propaganda was carried on by what the reformer now chose to designate as sneaks and hedge-preachers was past. The further extension of the Lutheran Reformation had become dependent upon the good-will of the ruling princes.

In the writings of Melchior Hofmann, the Anabaptist, there is found a remarkable passage indicating the mood in which this book of Luther's was received by the dissenters. Since they were severely persecuted in Saxony and were arrested as soon as they could be found by the authorities, Luther's insistence that they must call upon the parish pastor before beginning to labor in a given place sounded in their ears like cruel mockery. Says Hofmann in the same year in which this book was published: "Many cry out against the hedge-preachers and desire to have them come to the light, not with good intention, but to drink their blood."¹¹

A number of Anabaptists were executed in Saxony. Melanchthon, in an elaborate treatise, contends that they were worthy of death for heresy. If they did not advocate any other error, he says, than what they teach on baptism, original sin, and separation from the (established) church, it would be right to put them to the sword.¹² He refers to a decree of the emperors Honorius and Theodosius, that rebaptizers were to be executed. In a few instances Melanchthon assumed the rôle of an inquisitor toward imprisoned Anabaptists. Henry Crouth, an Anabaptist minister, was beheaded at Jena, January 27, 1536, in Melanchthon's presence and on his advice, although he had expressly declared his willingness to obey the government except in matters pertaining to religion. On the question "why he and others of his sect preached in secret places and not publicly in the pulpit," he gave the following striking reply: "The divine word is most severely persecuted and we are not permitted to preach; yet we must come together. This we do openly and not secretly. And while we are forbidden and hindered to preach the word, we are not even suffered to be doers of the word."¹³ Henry Crouth and his friends who shared his lot had the courage to reprove Melanchthon for sanctioning persecution.

¹⁰ Erlangen, Vol. XXXI, p. 226.

¹¹ Cornelius, *Münst. Aufruhr*, Vol. II, p. 225.

¹² *Corpus Reformatorum*, ed. Bretschneider, Vol. III, p. 200.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 1001.

They were in turn reminded that it was the authorities who were to deal with them; whereupon they said: "Yes, yes, you would wash your hands, like Pilate."¹⁴

Conspicuous among the Lutheran princes of the Reformation time for his advanced views on toleration was Landgrave Philip of Hesse, a ruler who disapproved of the death sentence for heresy. "We cannot find it in our conscience," he wrote to the elector of Saxony, "to have any person executed on account of his faith." Anabaptists were not condemned to death in Hesse. The landgrave also doubted the expediency of banishing them; hence Luther wrote to him in 1538: "It is not only my opinion, but my humble petition, that your Grace would earnestly forbid them the land, for they are nevertheless the devil's seed."¹⁵ Justus Menius, the friend of Luther, in 1530 wrote a book, *The Anabaptists' Doctrine and Mystery*, and dedicated it to the landgrave for the avowed purpose to persuade him to take more stringent measures for the suppression of heretical teachings. To this book Luther wrote the preface.

Landgrave Philip prevented, under peculiar circumstances, the execution of an Anabaptist in Saxony. In 1531 Frederick Erbe was apprehended as an Anabaptist by the Saxon authorities in the county of Hausbreitenbach. This county being under the joint jurisdiction of Saxony and Hesse, capital punishment could take place only with the consent of the rulers of both states. The elector desired to have Frederick Erbe condemned to death, but it was found impossible to obtain the landgrave's consent to such a proposition. Not even after Melanchthon and Luther had expressed themselves in favor of execution did the landgrave yield. Frederick Erbe, after he had been put to the rack, was consequently imprisoned for life in Wartburg castle. While about ten years before Luther had gone to the Wartburg for protection, Frederick Erbe was cast into the tower for the reason that he refused to approve of the teachings which Luther and the Saxon state church had meanwhile accepted. From 1531 to 1548, when death released him from his sufferings, Erbe was a prisoner at the Wartburg. The guardian of the castle gave him the testimony that he led a good life and was always obedient.¹⁶

Induced by the landgrave's scruples concerning the execution of heretics, the elector of Saxony asked the opinion of the Wittenberg theologians on the point in question. Melanchthon, as in a number of other instances, insisted on the necessity of the most stringent measures. The former

¹⁴ *Loc. cit.*, p. 998.

¹⁵ Erlangen, Vol. LVI, p. 43.

¹⁶ Schmidt, *Justus Menius, der Reformator Thüringens*, Vol. I, pp. 167 f.

mandates against heretical sects, he urges, should be "renewed and aggravated according to occasion." "That execution fails to bring the desired results, since the Anabaptists die so courageously, is not to be so highly regarded that on this account strict measures should not be taken. . . . For the devil is to be despised and not to be feared more than God." Under this document Luther wrote with his own hand: *Placet mihi Martino Luthero*.¹⁷

The fact that in Luther's opinion the Zwinglians, as well as the Anabaptists and other dissenters, were to be refused toleration has ofttimes been ignored. In 1529, at the Diet of Speier, the Catholic majority issued, in the name of the emperor, a decree that the Zwinglians ("the Sacramentarians") should no longer be tolerated in the empire. Luther had nothing to say against this proposition. He advised the elector of Saxony to accept it. "Concerning the other point," he wrote, "that His Electoral Grace should be obedient to His Imperial Majesty's command against the Anabaptists and Sacramentarians, it is right that His Electoral Grace should do this willingly, for of the forbidden creeds none is either found or tolerated in the land of His Electoral Grace, neither are they to be tolerated."¹⁸ In the previous year Luther had petitioned the elector to stop the mouth of a certain Hans Mohr, of Coburg, who had expressed himself as favorable toward Zwinglian views.¹⁹ In vain were the landgrave's efforts to persuade the Lutheran princes to make common cause with the Zwinglians in political matters.

The interesting question naturally arises: What would presumably have been the result, had Luther not discarded the principle of liberty of conscience? Was there reasonable prospect for at least some measure of success, if he insisted on religious toleration? Frederick the Wise, the most enlightened and tolerant of the Saxon rulers of the sixteenth century, would have considered an actual proposition of general toleration as visionary and impossible, both for political and other reasons; and this was also the view of Philip of Hesse. Among the people, on the other hand, there were great numbers who had been led to see the necessity of religious liberty. The peasants' reform movement of 1525, which eventually developed into the Peasants' War, would, if successful, have led to a separation of church and state. The first of the peasants' famous *Twelve Articles* was the demand that every congregation should be given the right to call or dismiss its minister. Luther, to whom the peasants appealed

¹⁷ *Corpus Ref.*, Vol. IV, p. 740.

¹⁸ DeWette, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 441.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

could not deny that he had taught the principle of the supreme authority of the congregation, but he asserted that they had a mistaken conception of it. Their demand for the abolition of serfdom he rejected, partly on the ground that a bondsman's body is the property of his lord, and to declare the serfs free would therefore be robbery. "In the peasants' uproar," Luther informs us in his *Table Talk*, "he [the elector] asked my advice whether he should agree to their Twelve Articles which they had presented to him for consideration at Meiningen. But I advised him strongly against it [saying] he should not consent to one of them."²⁰

It must be borne in mind that the peasants, in the first stage of the movement, expected liberty to be obtainable without an appeal to arms. They hoped that the movement would become national in scope and the authorities would not dare to stand in the way of progress and reform. Had Luther espoused their cause, as they expected, their hope for success would have been by no means unreasonable. But even at the time when the peasants did not propose to take up arms he informed them that he was praying God "that he may enlighten you and oppose your undertaking, and not permit it to be successful."²¹ It was unfortunate that before the beginning of the peasants' movement he had decided upon a union of church and state. He fully realized that their proposed reforms, moderate indeed and sane though their programme was, would, if accepted by the princes, bring to naught all his own plans for a uniform reformation of the church by the civil authorities. Hence Luther proved their most formidable foe. The incomparably heartless words in which he, somewhat later, called upon the rulers to crush the rebellion will ever stand as a blot on the reformer's name. His bitterest enemies rejoiced and helped to spread his writings on the subject. The people saw themselves betrayed by the one who had been so largely instrumental in bringing them to a realization of the perverseness of existing conditions. To the success, however, of the Lutheran reformation the attitude of the people became, after the Peasants' War, a matter of comparative indifference. They were given no voice whatever, either in religious or in secular matters. Luther had identified his cause with that of the princes; the consequence was a strengthening of autocratic government in Lutheran countries.

The principle of liberty of conscience was eliminated from Luther's programme of reforms when he resolved upon a union of church and state. But the seed which he had sown in the first years of his reformatory labors was destined to spring up and yield abundant fruit. There arose a mighty

²⁰ Erlangen, Vol. LXI, p. 2439.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXIV, p. 275.

popular party which took up the primeval war-cry of the Reformation—the Anabaptists. Had the state refused to lend its strong arm to any ecclesiastical body, the Anabaptists would, about the year 1528—i. e., a number of years before the rise of the Münster fanatics—have been the strongest religious party in South Germany. Those within the state churches, both new and old, who were ready to endure persecution for their creed constituted a far smaller number than that of the Anabaptist martyrs. Intolerance proved fraught with the direst consequences for the religious life of the people. All their anticipations of freedom were doomed to disappointment, and their religious interest, which had been aroused through Luther's early labors, turned into apathy and indifference. They accepted the principle expressed in the infamous maxim, *Cujus regio ejus religio*, which was formally subscribed to by the Estates in 1555; they professed the faith of the state and changed their creed on the command of the rulers—no less than five times in the instance of the unfortunate Upper Palatinate. The Anabaptists alone stood for separation of church and state and liberty of conscience; and only after their leaders and thousands of devoted Christian men and women had, within a few years, ended their lives at the stake or scaffold, did the movement lose its immediate peril to the old dogmas of state-churchism and “the burning of the heretics.” Although in northwestern Germany and Holland, in consequence partly of the unprecedented persecution, the movement for a time degenerated into fanaticism, it was never fully crushed. The Independents, Baptists, and Friends of England were the spiritual children of the Anabaptists—the true Protestants of the Reformation period.

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